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Nicaragua Picks A Revolutionary As Envoy to U.S.

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua, March 22—The Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry has created a new source of potential conflict with the Reagan administration by confirming this week that it intends to propose Nora Astorga as ambassador to Washington.

Astorga became famous in Nicaragua during the 1978 insurrection against dictator Anastasio Somoza when she lured Reynaldo Perez Vega, a general and alleged torturer in Somoza's National Guard, to her home. The rendezvous ended in a fatal ambush by Sandinista guerrillas.

"It's not usual for an ambassador to Washington to have her past," a diplomat said here today.

Astorga fled with the Sandinistas to Costa Rica, where she became one of the leading spokesmen.

U.S. officials here reportedly are irritated by the manner of the announcement as well as by the choice. "According to protocol, a Foreign Ministry first asks the host country for agreement before making the announcement public," a foreign source said. "The first the U.S. Embassy heard about Nora Astorga being proposed was when it appeared in the press two days ago."

Astorga is considered a hero by many Nicaraguans. A lawyer by profession, she is highly valued by the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front as one of its most professional administrators.

After Somoza's overthrow, Astorga headed the Sandinistas' special tribunals in charge of judging and



NORA ASTORGA

... played a role in a fatal ambush

sentencing "Somocista criminals." She was named vice minister of foreign relations in 1981.

"It's going to be very tough to get her approved, I think," a diplomat said. "It would be easier if she were much more high-ranking. We know a lot of heads of state have blood on their hands. But an ambassador is supposed to be different." The Foreign Ministry declined to comment.

[In Washington, an administration official said: "The knives are out" at the CIA to stop Astorga's acceptance. "It looks very serious," he said, adding that the intelligence community runs "suitability checks" on prospective ambassadors and informs the State Department within two weeks. It then makes recommendations to the president. "The question is what happens if we don't accept her," he said. "Maybe they don't (accept ours) and then neither side has one and things are much more serious than now."]

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